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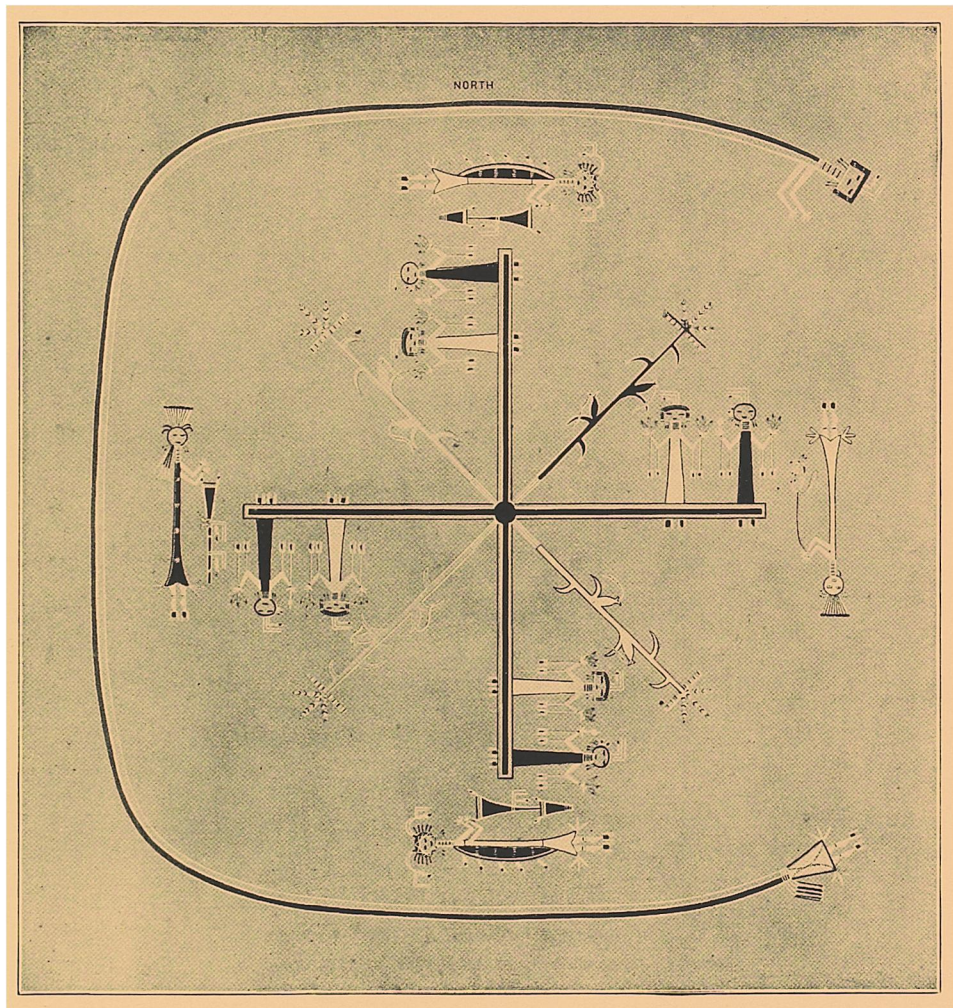
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Sacred Sand-Painting
"Place and Vision of the Whirling Logs"

SYMBOLISM IN NAVAHO ART

ABORIGINAL man was a keen observer of Nature. He had to be. His existence depended upon it. He watched the animals, that he might escape those that were dangerous and obtain those that were good for food; followed flying birds to trap them; gained fish, insect and plant knowledge; and grew familiar, not only with the movements of the polar constellations and the retrograde and forward motions of the planets, but also with less known phenomena, like the spiral movements of the whirlwind as they took up the sand of the desert, while the zigzags of lightning were burned into his consciousness. When his imitative faculty was aroused, and demanded expression, it was natural that he should attempt the reproduction of that which he was constantly observing.

Thus the origin of the art motifs of the aborigines, the North American Indians, results from their observation of Nature. This phase of their art has been fully brought out and developed by Mr. George Wharton Jones, both in his "Indian Basketry" and in his "Indian Blankets and Their Makers." Mr. Jones' book with handsome illustrations, several of them in colours, which show the full beauty of the blankets, is published by Messrs. A. C. McClurg & Co., of Chicago. Of the blankets he says that the Navaho blanket is the best in the world—that neither Ottoman fingers nor British machines have ever produced its peer.

He adds that the Franciscan Fathers of St. Michaels, Arizona, than whom no one has studied the Navaho more, asserts that the modern Navaho blanket is not one whit behind its predecessors of sixty or seventy years ago. They say, in addition: "The Navaho blanket is today the only thing of its kind in the world. No other people, white, red, black, brown, or yellow, turn out a textile fabric that can be placed beside it. It is true, Oriental rugs are woven in much richer patterns than the Navaho blanket, but, while the former bewilder the eye by their over-rich and overcrowded designs, the latter, by their very barbaric simplicity of design and well chosen colours, please and rest the eye at the same time." Hence it will be seen that Navaho blanket-weaving is not "a lost art," nor are the weavers a vanishing race.

The Navahos, from their observation of Nature, are a symbol-loving people. They have a symbolism of colour, and a symbolism of sex; symbols in the representations of their gods, and for almost every natural object connected with weather and meteorological phenomena.

From this symbolism the Navaho weaver gained her design. One unacquainted with the religious thought of the Navaho weaver might deem it absurd to affirm that there is a close connection between her religious observances and many of the designs introduced into her blankets. Yet Mr.

Jones clearly shows that there is an intimate connection between the two, and especially between the designs of the blankets and the sacred sand-paintings used by the Navaho medicine men or shamans in their religious ceremonies. Far more complex than the sand-paintings of the Hopis, the Zunis, or any other of the Pueblo tribes, those of the Navaho are marvellous in their symbolism, remarkable in their invention, and fascinating in their weird picturesqueness.

Dr. Washington Matthews, formerly with the Bureau of American Ethnology and whose work, "The Night Chant," is published by the American Museum of Natural History, writes that the excellence to which the Navahos have carried the art of dry-painting is as remarkable as that to which they have brought the art of weaving. The pigments, five in number, are white, made of white sandstone; yellow, of yellow sandstone; red, of red sandstone; black, of charcoal, mixed with a small proportion of powered red sandstone to give it weight and stability, "blue," made of black and white mixed. These are ground into fine powder, between two stones, as the Indians grind corn. The so-called blue is a blue-gray, but combined with other colours on the sandy floor it looks like a real blue. These coloured powders, prepared before the picture is begun, are kept on improvised trays of pine-bark. To apply them, the artist picks up a little between his first and second finger and his opposed thumb, and allows it to flow out slowly as he moves his hand. When he makes a mistake he does not brush away the colour; he obliterates it by pouring sand on it and then draws the corrected de-

sign on the new surface. The dry-paintings of the largest size, which are drawn on the floor of the medicine-lodge, are often ten to twelve feet in diameter. They are sometimes so large that the fire in the center of the lodge must be moved to one side to accommodate them. They are made as near to the west side of the lodge as practicable. The lodge is poorly lighted, and on a short winter day the artists must often begin their work before sunrise if they would finish before nightfall, which it is essential they should do. The drawings are begun as much toward the center as the design will permit, due regard being paid to the precedence of the points of the compass; the figure in the east being first, that in the south second, that in the west third, and that in the north fourth. The figures in the periphery come after these. The reason for thus working from within outward is practical; it is that the operators may not have to step over and thus risk the safety of their finished work.

The shamans declare that these pictures are transmitted unaltered from year to year and from generation to generation. No permanent design is anywhere preserved and there is no final authority in the tribe. The pictures are carried from winter to winter in the fallible memories of men. They may not be drawn in the summer. The custom of destroying these pictures at the close of the ceremonies and preserving no permanent copies of them arose, no doubt, largely from a desire to preserve the secrets of the lodge from the uninitiated.

Dr. Matthews includes among his illustrations a reproduction of the sacred sand painting, or dry-painting of

the "Place and Vision of the Whirling Logs." The chief character in the myth is the Visionary, who, whenever he goes out by himself, hears songs of spirits sung to him. His three brothers have no faith in him and say: "When you return from your solitary walks and tell us you have seen strange things and heard strange songs you are mistaken; you only imagine you hear these songs and you see nothing unusual."

In one of the Visionary's journeys he had marvelous and wonderful experiences with the gods which are now regarded as of the utmost importance, and the picture, painted by the medicine man with the greatest care, represents the vision of the prophet at the lake To'nihilin—the "Place and Vision of the Whirling Logs." The details of this highly symbolic production can readily be traced in the picture from the description by Dr. Matthews.

The bowl of water in the center, sprinkled with charcoal, symbolizes the lake. The black cross represents the spruce logs crossing one another. The colours edging the cross show the white foam on the waters, the yellow water-pollen, the blue and red rainbow tints.

Four stalks of corn are depicted as growing on the shores of the lake. The white stalk of corn belongs to the east; the blue, to the south; the yellow to the west, and the black to the north; but the conditions of the picture require that these stalks should be directed to intermediate points.

Eight divine characters—four male and four female—are shown seated on the floating logs. The legs of the four gods in the periphery of the picture are depicted, which indicates that they are

standing. But the legs of the eight gods on the cross are not depicted, which indicates that they are sitting. The four outer gods on the cross, dressed in black, are males. The sex is indicated by the round head representing the cap-like or helmet-like mask which a personator of a male divinity wears; by showing attached to the mask the two eagle-plumes and the tuft of owl-feathers worn by each male dancer in the dance of the last night; and by the symbol of a spruce twig in the left hand and of a gourd rattle painted white in the right—such implements being carried by the male dancers. The four inner gods, dressed in white are females. The sex is indicated by the rectangular mask or domino; by the yellow arms and chests—females were created of yellow corn and males of white corn, according to the myths—and by a symbol of spruce wand in each hand, for such wands the female dancer carries in the dance the last night.

The figures in the north and south represent humpbacks as they appear in the rites. These are Mountain Sheep or Bighorn Gods, and figure prominently in the myth of the Visionary. The blue male mask, the headdress with its zigzag line for white lightning, the radiating scarlet feathers to represent sunbeams, the blue imitation horns of the mountain sheep, the black sack of plenty on the back, and the staff on which the laden god leans, all are symbolized or depicted in the picture.

The white figure in the east is that of the Talking God. He is represented as wearing the white mask which the personator of this character always wears in the ceremonies, with its eagle-plumes tipped with breath-feathers, its tuft of yellow owl-feathers, its orna-

ment of fox-skin under the right ear, and its peculiar mouth-symbol and ear-symbols, but without the corn-symbol on the nose. He carries a pouch made of the gray skin of Abert's squirrel which is depicted with care.

The black figure in the west wears a beautifully ornamented black dress and a blue mask, decorated with eagle-plumes and owl-feathers. The ornament under his right ear consists of strips of otter-skin with porcupine quills. He carries in his hand a black wand coloured with charcoal of four different plants, ornamented with a single whorl of turkey-feathers, with two eagle-feathers tied on the cotton string, with a white ring at the base of the whorl, and with the skins of two bluebirds. The Talking God scatters pollen from his pouch while the three others are supposed to be punching the logs and causing them to whirl with their staves.

Surrounding the picture on three sides, appears the rainbow, with human attributes, the rainbow goddess, wearing (at the right end) the rectangular female mask and carrying at the waist (the left end) an embroidered pouch, tied on with four strings. The hands of all the other divinities are shown occupied, but the hands of the rainbow are shown empty, so that they may be ready to receive the cup of medicine which is placed on them after the picture is finished.

The rainbow and the eight divinities on the cross are represented with

breath-feathers tied on the tops of the heads by means of white cotton strings, and the horns of the Mountain Sheep Gods are similarly decked. All the gods are shown with garnished moccasins, tied with white strings. All of those showing their legs have rainbow garters. Five have ornamented fringes on their kilts or loincloths. The bodies of all are fringed with red to represent sunlight; for the Navaho artist does not confine the halo to the head of his holy subject. All have ear-pendants of turquoise and coral. The eight central figures are represented with strips of fox-skin—blue and yellow—hanging from elbows and wrists and garnished at their ends. Such adornments, it is said, were once used in the dance, but are now obsolete; they in turn represented beams of light. The yellow horizontal line at the bottom of each pictured mask represents a band at the bottom of the actual mask worn by the actor, and this band in turn symbolizes the yellow evening light.

All have the neck depicted in the same manner. The blue is generally conceded by the shamans to symbolize the collar of spruce twigs; but opinion is divided with regard to the meaning of the transverse red lines. The original significance of these is perhaps forgotten. Some say they represent the rings of the trachea; but those shamans whose opinion Dr. Matthews most values say they represent an obsolete neck ornament.